

**Opening Statement of
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing On
“Twenty-First Century Water Commission Act of 2007”
November 8, 2007**

Today's hearing comes during an historic week, where the House of Representatives came together in a bipartisan fashion and soundly overturned the President's veto of the Water Resources Development Act of 2007—WRDA. I especially want to applaud all of my colleagues from the Committee, both Democrat and Republican alike, unanimously voted for overriding the veto.

WRDA authorizes vitally important local projects for a wide array of water resources needs including water supply, flood control, navigation, and environmental restoration. WRDA recognizes the vital importance of taking a watershed approach to water resource needs. This bill includes dozens of projects to provide for watershed management and water supply needs in communities across the country.

Provisions are also included to reinvigorate broader watershed planning authority, including a federally funded assessment of water resources needs for the river basins and watersheds of the Southeastern United States, and a region wide study to review drought conditions in the Southwestern United States. These region-wide assessments are especially critical to the southeastern U.S., including the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, which are experiencing the ever-increasing challenge of balancing water needs during a record drought.

Earlier this year, the Committee received testimony from experts that highlighted the need for a comprehensive watershed approach to water resource planning. One that is not limited to just water supply needs but takes a comprehensive view of all the water resources activities in a watershed including local, state and federal roles and activities in water supply, flood control, and environmental restoration. The experts also advised taking into account the impacts of global climate change on water resource capacity and future needs.

As a result of those hearings, this past July, the Committee approved by voice-vote, legislation to create a comprehensive review of national water policies, also called the 21st Century Water Commission. This provision, which was included in the Transportation Energy Security and Climate Change Mitigation Act of 2007, establishes a commission to provide expert, scientific guidance on future water supply and demand projections, climate change impacts to our nation's flood risk and water demand, and associated climate change impacts on water quality.

This commission would study current federal, state, and local water resources management programs and activities, and ensure that the nation is adequately prepared to meet the water supply, water quality, and water resources demands of the next 50 years. This provision was incorporated into H.R. 3221, New Direction for Energy Independence, National Security, and Consumer Protection Act, which was approved by the House on August 4, 2007.

My home state of Texas has had long experience in water resource planning. Following the drought of the 1950's Texas began its initial efforts in statewide water planning. In 1957, the Texas legislature created the Texas Water Development Board. The Board has prepared and adopted eight state water plans. Early efforts focused mostly on describing the state's water resources and then evolved into a focus on developing plans addressing water supply, conservation, and environmental issues.

The drought of 1997 was a watershed event for Texas. This devastating drought caused nearly \$5 billion in losses for agriculture and related industries, and caused widespread loss and anxiety over water supply shortages. As a result of this statewide event, Texas totally changed its approach to water planning and moved from a very centralized approach to a decentralized process that put primary responsibility for water planning at the regional and local government levels.

The new process greatly increased public participation and implemented a bottom-up local and regional planning process. This new effort emphasized conservation and increases in environmental protection.

Texas has just released its 2007 Water Plan, which is one of the most comprehensive state water plans produced. I am very pleased that we have William Mullican, Deputy Executive Administrator for Planning, of the Texas Water Development Board here today to tell us more about this latest plan.